

# BHRC Public Meeting Minutes

September 30, 2020 at 5PM via Zoom due to COVID-19

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**Present:**       **Commissioners:** Chairwoman Margaret McKenna, Reyes Coll-Tellechea, Ben Goldberger, Leslie Harris, Leonard Lee, Anne Rousseau and Robert MacEachern  
**Staff:** Executive Director Evandro Carvalho and Executive Assistant Susan Helmy  
**Others:** Approximately 5 individuals from the public attended this meeting

## A. Introductions

1. Chairwoman Margaret McKenna called the Meeting to order at 5PM with all Commissioners in attendance.

## B. Chairwoman McKenna and Executive Director's Reports

1. Commission staff has been working on internal objectives such as drafting a mission statement, intake form and intake policy.
2. The Disability Commission has also reached out to BHRC to participate in their drive to make it an ordinance in the City of Boston that public businesses turn on captions on television sets.
3. Executive Director Evandro Carvalho spoke to the current budget of BHRC and the desire to hire additional staff members. BHRC currently has a budget of \$500,000 with \$250,000 of that money being reserved for anything that “touches and serves the community” as this is money that Mayor Walsh reallocated from the Boston Police Department’s Overtime Fund. Two staff positions that fall into this requirement is an Education and Outreach Coordinator and a Constituent Service Coordinator. The two other positions that could be beneficial to the Commission are Director of Enforcement and Investigations and a Research and Policy Analyst.
  - a. Commissioners Goldberger and Rousseau stated that hiring a consultant might be ideal since the process is faster than hiring someone full time.
  - b. Commissioners also requested that they be provided a calendar for FY2022 budget deadline before the next meeting so that they can plan ahead.

## C. Potential Projects

### 1. Access to Information & the Digital Divide

- a. Chairwoman McKenna spoke to the change that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced onto our lives. Everything from telehealth to schools and businesses have been forced to function online. This is a new way of life but some individuals and certain communities are struggling more than others. There are communities that have redlined from having good speed, access and broadband to the internet and there is no justification for this issue.
- b. Commissioner Lee stated that this is not a new issue, it is one that the COVID-19 pandemic has shed more light on. This has been an issue for 15 years and companies like Verizon have been strategically placing internet cable around neighborhoods such as Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan.
- c. Commissioner Coll-Tellechea is a professor at the University of Massachusetts Boston and she had witnessed firsthand that students were

provided chromebooks to use, however many of their homes have little to no internet access.

- d. Chairwoman McKenna stated that the BHRC should conduct a hearing containing some data and stories of the individuals affected by these internet deserts.
  - a. Commissioner Goldberger suggested that the hearing last multiple days. The first day should have individuals stating their own experiences with the internet deserts while statistics are also provided. Day 2 of the hearing is where we should bring in representatives from companies such as Verizon and Xfinity to give them the opportunity to respond to these stories and data.
- e. A vote was taken at the end of this discussion on whether the Commissioners would like to take ownership of this issue and conduct a hearing as stated. It was unanimously agreed that the BHRC would.

## **2. Housing Discrimination**

- a. Chairwoman McKenna began this topic by stating that the end of the rent and mortgage moratorium is one that is going to be very detrimental to many individuals within the City of Boston. Chairwoman McKenna stated that she reached out to the individual that analyzed the statistics for a study conducted by the Boston Foundation and Suffolk Law School “Qualified Renters Need Not Apply: Race and Voucher Discrimination in the Metro Boston Rental Housing Market.” She is waiting to receive the data specifically from Boston and will be sharing it with the Commission.
- b. Commissioner Rousseau stated that the Office of Housing Stability within the City of Boston is looking into ways that they could help with the end of this moratorium. The State of Massachusetts has also put 15 millions into RAFT which is a program to help prevent individuals from getting evicted.

## **3. Health Inequities Task Force and Boston Police Reform Task Force**

- a. The Health Inequities Task Force is made up of individuals from different backgrounds that are focused on disparities within the City of Boston, whether it is health, economics or education. Commissioner Goldberger stated that once their report is released, we can decide what our role could be since this Task Force’s purpose is right in our wheelhouse.
- b. Commissioner Harris stated that the issues that the Boston Police Reform Task Force is dealing with are the issues that the BHRC should be involved in. Commissioners Harris, Coll-Tellechea and Lee all agree that when their finalized report comes out in the next few weeks, the Commissioners should meet with the leaders of this Task Force so that we can formulate a plan as to how we can play a role and make sure that this report stays relevant.
- c. Commissioner Lee pointed out that we have to make sure that we pick and choose exactly where we want to insert ourselves since the Boston Police Reform Task Force alone will take a lot of our time.

## **4. Immigrant Community**

- a. The issues of this community directly intersect with the Digital Divide, Health Inequities Task Force and the Boston Police Reform Task Force.

- b. Chairwoman McKenna stated that as a Commission, we should make sure that the immigrants in our city know their rights and that the Trust Act is enforced. We can either find a way to support Executive Director Yusufi Vali of the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement or bring something to the table ourselves.
- c. Commissioner Coll-Tellechea stated that the idea of Outreach or "Know your Rights" training is a great idea but we should also educate the community on voting rights since new Americans are easily intimidated. Commissioner Coll-Tellechea also stated that the City of Boston needs to provide more ballot dropbox locations in minority and immigrant communities.
- d. Executive Director Carvalho explained the Trust Act and how it is intended to prohibit state and local law enforcement from sharing information with ICE. He then went on to state that our role in the Immigrant Community will be more of an advocacy and education piece.

#### **5. LGBTQ and Transgender Community**

- a. Executive Director Carvalho started this conversation by speaking to the uprise of violence in this Community and how individuals of this community simply do not have a place to turn to for help. The severity of this need was made apparent to him when he attended a City Council hearing last month on this issue.
- b. Commissioner Coll-Tellechea stated that something needs to be done about public restrooms. Most importantly however, we should conduct some sort of outreach to this community to let them know that we are a Commission that they can turn to for help.
- c. Chairwoman McKenna stated that the State has done a good job and has even started earlier on helping this community than other states. We should touch base with the leaders of this community to see what exactly is the role that we can play.

#### **6. Marginalization of Young Black Males**

- a. Commissioner Lee stated that the healing of the marginalization of young black males should be a project that the BHRC takes on. He stated that there is no sole group that is working on the healing of these young males. Male centers and programs should be developed to help both the public and mental health of these young individuals. American born black men are simply disappearing.
- b. Commissioner Goldberger suggested that the BHRC create a full day seminar or symposium where BHRC can either collaborate with others or the Mayor himself. This event can be a recurring event where we have conversations with young black males and have speakers come share their stories.

#### **D. Public Comments**

- 1. Elena Taborda asked about the timeline of the additional staff hirings and where the job posting would be announced. Executive Director Carvalho informed her that the PRC hiring process will get started as soon as possible and that the job postings would be made on the City of Boston website.

**E. Votes**

1. Three votes were taken during this meeting.
  - a. Majority vote of approval of the July 30<sup>th</sup> 2020 Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Robert MacEachern chose to abstain since he was absent for the previous meeting.
  - b. Unanimous vote of approval for a motion made to the Election Department and the Mayor regarding an increase of ballot dropboxes in minority and immigrant communities.
  - c. Unanimous vote to adjourn at 6:42pm.